

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Edward M. Gallaudet, March 2, 1891

1336 Nineteenth Street, Washington, D.C. (Copy.) March 2nd. 1891. Dear President Gallaudet;

Your note of March 1st. received.

I reply please, find enclosed copies of all my communications to Mr. Fechheimer.

Allow me to request a similar courtesy from you.

Yours truly, Alexander Graham Bell. Pres. E. M. Gallaudet. Kendall Green? . Copy.

I send another copy of my address before the committee of the House, in case you did not receive the first. The principal of the Cincinnati Oral School has a copy of Dr. Gallaudet's reply. A. G. B. 1336 Nineteenth Street, Washington, D.C., Feb. 12th, 1891. L. S. Fechheimer, Esq., Cincinnati, Ohio. My dear Sir:

In applying to Congress for a grant to enable the National College for Deaf Mutes to train deaf teachers to teach the deaf, President Gallaudet claims to be carrying out the views you expressed to Mr. Butterworth last year, and he uses your name in his letter of application to the Secretary of the Interior, asking for the grant.

Knowing that you have a son in the Northampton School, and that you were the founder of the Cincinnati Oral School, I cannot believe that your name is used with your knowledge and approval, or that you would consent to a plan that would work injury to the oral cause in America.

I, therefore, write to you now to claim your assistance in the present crisis.

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The appropriation for Dr. Gallaudet has passed the House of Representatives, and is now before the Senate and may be taken up at any time. I sent you (addressed to the care of the Cincinnati Oral School) a copy of the statement I made to the Appropriation Committee of the House, and Dr. Gallaudet's reply. If you agree with the stand I have taken, you can help me very greatly by a telegram to that effect, for I may be called before the Senate Committee before a letter could reach me.

I have already received telegrams and letters from the principals of all the oral schools in the country endorsing my position. We are unanimously of the opinion that this appropriation, if granted, for the purpose specified, will work injury to the cause of articulation teaching in America.

I am anxious to divert the appropriation rather than cut it off altogether. If Dr. Gallaudet can be made to see that there is no chance of his getting the money for the purpose he asks, I think he will be willing to apply it to the introduction of oral teaching into the College rather than lose it altogether. The only difficulty here is, will the Senate grant it?

I am afraid that the idea of establishing, in a college for "deaf mutes," a professorship of elocution seems to the Senatorial mind rather a Quixotic idea, and there is great skepticism regarding the possibility of teaching persons born deaf to speak. If the Senate Committee on Appropriations gives me a hearing, will you allow your son to appear also? I believe that his presence would convert skepticism into conviction, and I would add to the introduction of oral teaching into the College. The moment the day is fixed I could telegraph to Miss Yale so that she could bring your son to Washington in time for the hearing. I need hardly say that both Mrs. Bell and I will do our best to make your son's stay agreeable to him, so that he may carry away pleasant recollections of his visit to Washington.

I think also that your presence here, or at least some communication from you showing that you are in sympathy with the stand I take, would have a good influence with the

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committee, for your name is used by Dr. Gallaudet as though he were carrying out your views.

Yours very sincerely, Alexander Graham Bell. P. S. I am indebted for your address to a telegram from Miss Yale. A.G.B.

Memorandum.

On February 16th I received a telegram from Mr. Fechheimer in answer to the foregoing letter, endorsing my position and giving me permission to have his son appear before the Senate committee. I was then in New York in conference with Miss Yale and other members of the Association. I sent a telegram to Mr. Fechheimer from New York, of which I have no copy. I thanked him for his telegram and stated that the Senate committee, if they heard me at all, would give me so brief a hearing that I did not think it worth while bringing his son on from Northampton.

A.G.B.

(Copy) Feb. 18 ? , 1891. Dear Sir:

Mr. Bell has just returned from the Senate completely tired out, and he asks me to drop you a hurried note to say that as a result of the hearing he understood the committee to say that they would not grant any appropriation to establish a Normal Department for the training of teachers in connection with the National College, and that, if they made any appropriation at all, it would be for the introduction of oral teaching into the College.

They asked President Gallaudet how much they would want for a professor of elocution, &c., and he replied from \$2,500 to \$3,000. Mr. Bell protested that \$5,000 would not be too much, and urged the granting of the whole \$5,000 for this special purpose. The committee then declared the hearing at an end.

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Respectfully yours, Arthur W. McCurdy, Secy. L.S. Fechheimer, Esq., 141 Race Street,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Feb. 21/91. Dear Mr. Fechheimer:

Enclosed I send for your information a copy of a letter I have just sent to Mr. Dobyne, of
Jackson, Miss., in which you may be interested.

Yours truly, Alexander Graham Bell.

1336 19th Street, Washington, D.C., February 21st, 1891. Dear Mr. Dobyne:

I must thank you very much for your straightforward letter of the 17th instant. I am always
glad to hear a man's honest views, honestly expressed, even though I may not agree with
them.

In reference to the different methods of instructing the deaf, you say:

"After all these years of earnest and faithful, but "generous rivalry, I am indeed grieved that
you have "taken a step, the logical result of which is to build up "the method you advocate
by tearing down the one which, "for almost a century, has showered incalculable blessings
"upon the deaf of this country."

In this statement I think you do me an injustice. I do not see how I "tear down" a method
by asking the Government to allow "the earnest and faithful but generous rivalry" to
go on uninfluenced by Government grants to one method over the other. I am just as
much opposed to a Government training school on the oral method as to one on the sign
method, and I believe that an ? ? eclectic school in which both methods shall be taught is
impracticable. All I ask of Congress is to let the methods alone—let them be worked out by
private enterprise and the fittest will survive.

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It is surely a confession of weakness upon your part when you say that the “logical result” of leaving the methods alone (!) will be “to build up the method which I advocate and tear down the other.” In other words you claim that the sign method cannot exist without Government aid, and the other can.

The only training schools for teachers of the deaf that exist in England are, as you know, oral schools. These schools undoubtedly hoped that the Royal Commission would recommend the British Government to support them and establish them as Government schools for training teachers of the deaf. I opposed the plan before the Royal Commission just as I now oppose the plan of President Gallaudet. The remarks I made in England against Government oral training schools are equally applicable here, against sign schools.

In answer to question 21,756, I said:

“I would not advocate the establishment, by “the Government, of a special training school for “teachers of the deaf, for the reason that it “will tend to the perpetuation of some one method “of instruction. I believe that diversity “in methods of instruction will be advantageous “to progress, if there is competent supervision “and examination of results and payment by results; “and it would be better to draw our “teachers from all the normal schools of the “country, and let them acquire their special “training in schools and institutions for the “deaf. It would be a very proper thing for “special training schools to be established “by private enterprise to propagate some special “method, and such teachers might be accepted “and recognized by the Government, if “their general qualifications came up to the “Government standard.”

In reference to the establishment of training colleges in America, I said: (Royal Commission, Q. 21,795)

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“Special training colleges might very “properly be established by private enterprise, “but I do not think it would be well for the “Government to do so. Government action would “be apt to interfere with healthy competition “between methods of instruction, by encouraging “some one system at the expense of the others. “I would have the Government take no part in “the contest between Systems of instruction “otherwise than as an impartial judge of the “results.”

You seem to consider the Association formed at the New York Convention as an association to propagate the oral method of instruction. This is not so, and if you have this idea you are laboring under a very great and serious mistake. We have on our Board of Directors representative of all the different methods of instruction in use in America. Examine their names and you will recognize at once that they can only most on neutral ground.

Our Association is an entirely neutral body, having nothing to do with the propagation of the oral or any other method of instruction. We simply desire to promote the teaching of speech to the deaf and the training of articulation teachers—not necessarily teachers of the oral method. I will send you a copy of the constitution and by-laws as soon as printed. The names of the Directors are as follows:

Ellen L.Barton,

A.Graham Bell,

Philip G.Gillett,

D.Greenberger,

Gardiner G.Hubbard,

Mary H.True,

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Z.F.Westervelt,

Caroline A.Yale.

Whatever President Gallaudet's views may be regarding the ultimate growth of his training school he asks this increase of appropriation of \$5,000 for the specific purpose of training the graduates of his college to become teachers of the deaf. He, therefore, would not be at liberty to use this appropriation for any other purpose (such as the training of hearing teachers) even though he desired to do so. The exact wording of his application to Congress is as follows (see estimates of appropriation 1891–92, page 322).

“The object of this increase is to enable the “Directors to enlarge the facilities afforded in the Institution “for normal instruction. For many years “the graduates of our collegiate Department have “been in demand as teachers of the deaf in the “primary schools of the several States. The demand “for such teachers has far outgrown our “limited supply. And as no normal school for “the training of teachers of the deaf exists “in this country, while several are sustained in “Europe, it has been thought extremely desirable “that the advantages for normal instruction “existing in this Institution to a limited degree “should be increased.”

Deaf persons cannot, of course, become of and an increase in the number of deaf teachers employed will necessarily retard articulation teaching in the primary schools of the country. I hold that the proper function of the college is to give the highest possible education to deaf persons to enable them to go out into the world and occupy honorable positions in life among hearing and speaking people. This appropriation is to send them back to deaf schools to live their whole lives among the deaf.

Although President Gallaudet in conversation speaks of a training school for hearing teachers and in his thirty fifth report (page 11) seconds the suggestion of Mr.Fechheimer and assures Congress of the correctness of his (Mr.Fechheimer's) statements, namely,

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that they “could” give thorough normal training in both the manual and oral methods, his proposition to Congress which I have quoted above is limited to the training of deaf teachers. Even were it otherwise, I would oppose it for the reasons I have specified above. Even supposing an eclectic school in which both methods should be taught to be practicable (which I do not admit), such a scheme would require a practice school containing many young deaf children. The District of Columbia which supports the Kendall School is too small to supply the requisite number of pupils, quite independently of the fact that they do not have an oral department there from which the sign language is excluded.

An eclectic training school, if practicable, could only be successful in connection with one of the larger institutions of the country where an oral department is established.

How, my dear Mr.Dobyns, you must not think that I am ungrateful to you and the other advocates of the sign method who so cordially welcomed me to your Convention and thanked me for what I had done to promote the teaching of speech to the deaf. I would not have you think that I desire to “tear down” the sign method or any other method of instructing the deaf. All I want is fair play among the methods and equal treatment of all. I would say to the Government “Hands off—let them fight it out among themselves.” I have full confidence that the struggle will end in the survival of the fittest if only the Government can be induced to let them alone.

I am, my dear Mr.Dobyns, Yours sincerely,

(Copy) Sunday, Feb.22nd, 1891. L.S.Fechheimer, Esq., 141 Race Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.
My dear Sir:

As you express a desire in your note of the 20th inst. to be kept informed of what transpires concerning President Gallaudet's application to Congress, I write to report progress.

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The Sundry Civil Bill was reported to the Senate yesterday by the Committee on Appropriations, with an amendment recommending that the grant to the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb be reduced from \$52,500 to \$47,500, being the same amount appropriated last year. I called on Senator Allison this morning and he suggested that I should see Senator Dawes, who represents the Institution in the Senate—as Director—as he understood that Senator Dawes would probably offer an amendment on behalf of the Institution to-morrow.

Senator Dawes informed me that he had offered an amendment in committee on behalf of President Gallaudet to the following effect:

Amendment.

Strike out the words “Fifty two thousand five hundred dollars,” and insert “Fifty thousand five hundred dollars, three thousand dollars of which shall be devoted to the expenses of a professor of articulation of the Collegiate Department of the Institution.”

The committee had overruled this and had cut down the appropriation to \$47,500, the same amount as last year. I told Senator Dawes that I thought \$3,000 was an inadequate sum to provide thorough articulation teaching for the seventy one students of the College, the amendment met my hearty endorsement.

Senator Dawes then said that he would like to propose the amendment again upon the floors of the Senate to-morrow when the bill comes up for discussion, if Senator Allison, the chairman of the Appropriation Committee, would acquiesce.

He requested me to see Senator Allison again and urge him to accept the amendment. I did so with pleasure, and Senator Allison replied that personally he was in favor of the amendment, but would not commit himself until he had consulted with his colleagues on

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the committee. I reported the result of my interview to Senator Dawes and told him that I hoped his amendment would pass. So the matter rests for the present.

I shall watch the proceedings to-morrow with interest and shall have much pleasure in keeping you informed of what goes on.

Yours very sincerely, Alexander Graham Bell.

ing your last note to me, with copy of your letter to President Gallaudet.

Yours sincerely, Alexander Graham Bell. L.S.Fechheimer, Esq., Cincinnati, Ohio.

(Copy) March 1st, 1891. Dear Mr.Fechheimer:

Your note of the 20th inst.,enclosing copy of your letter to Dr. Gallau ? d et of the 21st inst. has been received.

Allow me to thank you with all my heart for the confidence you have reposed in me.

Yours very sincerely, Alexander Graham Bell. L.S.Fechheimer, Esq., Cincinnati, Ohio.

No.

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